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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Saturday, July 27, 1935

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "NEWS NOTES FROM WASHINGTON." Items of interest to women, from the United States Department of Agriculture.

--ooOoo--

Homemakers, prepare to go traveling today. With our Washington correspondent as guide, we're to meet Professor Nicholas Roerich, (Rore-ich) "somewhere in Asia." Probably on the edge of the Gobi (Go-be) desert, for that's where the botanical explorers from the United States Department of Agriculture are searching for plants this month -- plants that will grow in the dry regions of the West, and keep the American landscape firmly in place when the next drought comes along.

Last December, you may recall, our Washington correspondent sent us a report about two government plant explorers, H. L. Westover and C. R. Enlow, who had just returned from an expedition that took them over most of Turkey, and the deserts and foothills of Russian Turkestan. They were looking for plants hardy enough to resist even a very severe drought. And, you may remember, Westover and Enlow brought back more than 18 hundred lots of seed from drought-resistant plants.

But our Washington correspondent will bring the story up to date, and lead us out to the edge of the Gobi desert:

"It may interest you to know," she writes, "that the 18 hundred lots of seed Westover and Enlow brought back with them from Turkestan are now growing in the plant reserve stations established by the Department of Agriculture. Just recently, new lots of seed have arrived, from Manchuria and Mongolia, and more will be on the way this fall.

"Professor Roerich is in charge of the present Asiatic expedition. In a recent report to Secretary Wallace, he describes some of the results of erosion, in Asia.

"In the completely dead sands of Asia," says our correspondent, "Professor Roerich unearthed the roots of age-old forests. Strangely enough, he found excellent dwelling-sites and bits of woven grasses, indicating that life once flourished there.

"Quoting Professor Roerich: 'The ancient Chinese chronicles. . . describe these now-eroded sites as picturesque cities and villages, which flourished admist plenty. We cannot attribute these changes entirely to cosmic actions. The hand of man has been especially reprehensible. In the dead deserts of Asia,' (still quoting) 'one may often hear the murmur of under-ground streams, which at times give rise to the beliefs in subterranean life. Not seldom, these streams have been driven under stones and pebbles by human hands which have rapaciously destroyed the vegetation.'"

According to our Washington correspondent, in spite of all that man has done, for centuries, to destroy all vegetation in the dead deserts of Asia, and in spite of adverse natural conditions, some vegetation still exists.

Quoting Professor Roerich again: "Upon these sand dunes, upon these endless mounds, one still finds remnants of the great forests; there still are found great quantities of feathergrass, and other steppe grasses at once strongly resistant and useful for forage. Crossing the endless desert spaces, I always realize the countless possibilities still preserved in these virgin steppes. I do not even venture to speak here of the vast store of medical plants scattered throughout these regions, and still utilized so little by men, since science has only now begun to pay attention to these treasures which have been known for centuries, but which have been forgotten in the bustle of life."

. . . . Now, our correspondent gives us a few facts about this expedition, headed by Professor Roerich. It was sent to the regions bordering the Gobi desert because of the great pasture lands there -- lands which are able to stand the terrific heat of summer, the cold of winter, and scanty rainfall. For hundreds of years, grasses and legumes which can cope with these conditions have been developing and increasing. Here you see the survival of the fittest. No region in the world, according to the Department of Agriculture scientists, offers more promise of obtaining economic plants that will resist drought, and bind the soil together. The discovery of just one desirable plant species would repay the costs of the expedition many thousands of times; that is, the discovery of a plant that would resist drought in the Great American Plains, and help control erosion.

In years past, other plants brought in from Asia have been of untold value to American agriculture -- soybeans, for example, various lespedezas (les-puh-dee-zas), the Chinese elm, and crested wheat grass.

One of the best fodder plants the Roerich expedition found in the region east of the Gobi desert is a species of wheat grass, with a scientific name that will make you sit up and take notice. The scientific name is Agro-pyron pseudo-agropyrum, (Agro-py-ron soo-doe-agro-py-ron), and it's also known as Elymus (El-i-mus) pseudo-agro-pyrum. (It would be all right with me if the scientists would stick to one name for this wheat grass.)

Now, would you like to know what the land looks like, over there east of the Gobi desert? According to our correspondent, who got her information from Professor Roerich's report to Secretary Wallace, the region looks like a large plain. Altitude, about two thousand feet. Climate, "snowless, rigorously cold winter, a cold and rather rainless spring and autumn, and a hot dry summer, for although there is more rain in the summer, the water quickly evaporates, owing to the heat which sometimes reaches over one hundred degrees Fahrenheit."

Now then. . . Do you envy the plant explorers?

I'm going to ask our Washington correspondent to get an interview with Professor Roerich when he comes back to Washington, and give us more details of the expedition. I'd like to know more about the people who live over there -- what they eat, how they live, and so on.

But no more today. I'll be with you as usual on Monday.

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